

## DUXBURY HAD THE FIRST DEPARTMENT STORE IN THE COUNTRY

The following article was taken from the Aug. 28, 1920 issue of the *Boston Evening Transcript*:

From the hitching post at Ford's Store the largest hill to the northeast is Duck Hill, where I had a singular adventure. After having hunted every nook and corner of the surrounding country in search of some of the "old timers" who could remember the glories of the other days, I chanced upon Tom Weston. What a patriarch he appeared as he stood tossing his hay on the uplands much as he had done for "precious nigh 80 years past."

"Shore," says he, "I calc'late 'twas the busiest place in the country. Folks a-comin' and goin' from Tinkertown to Tarkiln. Used to git me corn ground at Seth Southworth's mill down thar below and trade it off at Nat Ford's." Suddenly he raised his husky, cracking, but still strong voice, and ended menacingly, "I swan I've killed 8 men up thar."

Somewhat astonished, I withdrew a step.

"You've killed 8 men!" I repeated.

"Yas," he chuckled, "I've done enough work around thar to kill 8 men."

Upon receiving this droll retort my wonderment gave way to many searching questions, which he answered to the best of his still good memory.

This store was established in 1826 under the name of James T. Ford & Co., the firm including James Turner Nathaniel Ford and Peleg Ford, 3 brothers. About 1843 Nathaniel and his 2 sons took over the business and they were the active proprietors through the heyday of its power. In conjunction with the Duxbury establishment this enterprising family ran a hat store on Ann St., Boston.

This general store of the Fords was well known far and wide all over the country and did a large and flourishing business. In the palmiest days during the 40's and 50's, its trade amounted to \$200,000 a year.

### July 4 Vandalism

Standing a pace to the north is the old Duxbury "ordinary," later the boarding house or tavern, now a residence. Here ate and lodged the hands who worked at the mill run by the Ford

brothers in the valley blow. The mill, unfortunately, exists no more, having been burned down for the pleasure of some boys one Fourth of July. Little did those irresponsible youngsters realize the significance of the building they so lightly sacrificed for their pleasure, for the oldest part of the building dated from the time of Myles Standish, who, with his own hands drew up the grant which permitted Seth Southworth to erect this, the first licensed mill in America.

Later the Ford brothers bought and used it for a variety of manufactures. They made satinetts there 7 years in succession. Later tacks, yarns, and trowels, were turned out, after which the building was converted into a grist mill. It might be interesting to note there that this old mill was adjacent to the property of the famous Benjamin Church, leader and historian of King Philip's war.

### When the Stage Pulled In

The goods which stocked Ford's Store came from far and near. Most of the necessities arrived in packets from Boston. The stagecoach of Sprague & Jones brought small supplies from Boston between stocking-up periods. Jones drove the stage and it was his boast he could remember the destination of all

articles to the number of 50. On busy days, when there were more than this number, he had to quit with his memory and keep tally. The "pullin'in" of the stage from Boston was a cause for a small celebration in those uneventful days.

### Luxuries Imported

East Indian and Oriental luxuries were brought from the opposite side of the globe in ships owned by that famous old dignitary Ezra Weston, popularly called "King Caesar," who was reputed by Daniel Webster to be the largest shipowner and builder in the country. Indeed, at one time 20 to 25 ships were being built at different yards about the town under the personal supervision of "Caesar the King." Notwithstanding the extensive business in building ships, this sturdy pioneer was able to maintain several ships sailing the high seas in active trade with the remote Southern and Oriental ports. The memory of those magnificent old "square riggers" never fails profoundly to stir the imagination of all who love the sea today; but how unconscious were those seafaring forbears themselves of the beauty in the small world they created and the life they led.

That nobleness and grandeur  
all that beauty,  
Born of manly life and  
bitter duty.

The assortment of goods imported by the Fords was the most extensive of any store outside of Boston. We can easily imagine the open-eyed wonderment with which the thrifty natives must have gazed at these strange fineries and extravagances. Fantastically patterned china there was from Hong Kong, and brocades from Canton, elaborately wrought. Pungent spices from the East Indies and teas fragrantly suggesting the flower fields of Japan. Occasionally, weather permitting, the country folk were given the extraordinary privilege of seeing and perhaps tasting bananas and oranges from the West Indies, not to speak of the gin all the way from Jamaica.

### Prices of Other Days

Fortunately some of the old records of the firm, including the first account book, are in excellent state of preservation. All entries are painstakingly written in ink with a flourish that we do not affect in these hasty times. On the first day in 1826 one notices that Joseph Simons bought the following articles:

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| 14 gals. molasses | 1.35 |
| 14 lbs. sugar     | 1.61 |
| 1 gal. N.E. rum   | .38  |

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| 1 quire paper    | .20 |
| 2 pr. shoes      | .98 |
| 2 papers needles | .14 |
| 1 lb. tobacco    | .05 |

All will agree there is more than one reason to look-back with envy upon the glorious past.

On July 3, 1827, in preparation for the celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on the morrow, Rufus Churchill indulged in 2 glasses of wine at a cost of 6 cents. John Oldham was a more staid celebrator and purchased 4 1/2 pounds of cheese, for which he paid 38 cents. Eleoger Harlow laid in one quart of West India rum, price 20 cents, and one quart of Holland gin at 25 cents. Nathaniel Hunt bought a pound of shot for 10 cents and paid for half of it with 6 eggs, leaving himself debtor to the amount of 5 cents.

All the names in the books in those days had a gratifying New England flavor and the greater portion repeat those of the small band that landed from the Mayflower. Some, for instance, were Howland, Brewster, Winslow, Bradford, Delano, Standish, Alden, Samson, Winsor, Chilton, Sowle, etc.

One of the Fords' most gracious customers was Adelaide Phillips, the opera singer of international repute in the 60's.

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## FORD STORE

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Her estate adjoined Daniel Webster's and during her summers at home she did all her shopping at the old store. Her lavish parties were renowned far and near, particularly for the variety of pretty girls she culled from Duxbury, where beauty seemed to be indigenous.

### Benjamin Cushman's Finery

At one time the reigning belle of the town was young Nancy Alden. Her charm held sway at about the period of 1840. One day she gaily tripped into Ford's Store to buy some ribbon. Her fascinating presence moved the gallant clerk to quick action in procuring it for her, and during the course of the few necessary words Miss Alden exercised her magnetic power to such a degree that the enamored clerk took the liberty of a kiss. Straightway this fair descendant of Priscilla turned upon her toe to go out without paying for her ribbon, whereupon the victim of her charms called after her for payment. Without hesitating she flung back the retort, "I never paid a bigger price for anything!"

Contemporaneous with Nancy Alden was Benjamin Cushman, who sported about as the dandy of the town. The 2 so often appeared together that people concluded that these 2 leading lights would make a match. Nothing came of it, however, and the 2 separated and followed divergent paths to the end of the chapter. In one of the account books an entry appears showing that this "Beau Brummel" had purchased one day a silk hat at \$7 and some fine

silk hose at \$1.50. Evidently he intended prinking himself for a particularly critical call.

A great many of the characters of the town gave expression to their individuality through devious channels rather than virtuous ones. This, it is needless to say, did not deter them from adding a splash of local color. One does not like to think how dull and monotonous drama, literature and art would be without the wayward, retrogressive characters. Such a personality was "Bidley Soule." In his youth he was tall, straight and handsome and his mind was straight, too, but as he advanced in years both his mind and body became warped. Finally he was dubbed the dirtiest man of the country. Nevertheless, he was interesting for a certain caustic humor of his own and woe betide the one who felt its sting. When once he shuffled into the old store in all his filth and rags, a certain lady not renowned for her beauty addressed him saying, "Well, you're a pretty looking object!" He turned, made her a sweeping bow and said, "I'm sorry I can't say the same of you, ma'm"

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### Aunt Sarah's Rhymes

Perhaps the most interesting character of all was Aunt Sarah Mac. She was quite expert as a rhymster and was handy in constructing verses about town matters, never failing to find out the evil doers and show them up, consequently such people feared her more than any public officer. Acts of goodness were equally celebrated by the well-meaning old lady and useful enterprises often had a few lines of praise, as for instance, when a new mill was built on the hill in rivalry to the one the Fords had in the valley. old Sarah said:

On this hill there stands a mill  
Built by men of wonderful skill  
Many a long year wish it may  
stand

For it's an honor to that piece of  
land.

Solomon built a temple  
but never a mill

And this wise Solomon  
they have outdone

For I never heard that he  
every built one.

A small child, Polly Glass,  
called out to the ancient dame as  
she went by on her way from the  
store:

There goes Sarah Mac  
With a bag of meal on her back.

To which she replied:

Polly Glass you've told a lie,

One-half's Injun,

t'other half's rye.

No doubt ambitious Polly, with  
the wind taken out of her sails,  
shrank away and, probably never  
ventured to cross swords with old  
Sarah again.

The popularity of the store  
caused it to be a meeting place for  
town affairs. Outside its doors  
gathered the voters, who freely  
discussed the pros and cons of the  
latest political development. An

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## COOKING

